

VZCZCXRO2708
RR RUEHBI RUEHCI RUEHDBU RUEHLH RUEHPW
DE RUEHEK #1425/01 3380409
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 040409Z DEC 07
FM AMEMBASSY BISHKEK
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0424
INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 2348
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/OSD WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0770
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 2752
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2136
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO BRUSSELS BE
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORP
RUMICEA/USCENTCOM INTEL CEN MACDILL AFB FL

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 BISHKEK 001425

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR SCA/CEN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/04/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [KG](#)

SUBJECT: KYRGYZ PARTY LEADERS AND OFFICIALS DISCUSS
ELECTION PREPARATIONS WITH CENTRAL ASIA OFFICE DIRECTOR
SPRATLEN

REF: BISHKEK 1421

BISHKEK 00001425 001.2 OF 004

Classified By: CDA Lee Litzenberger, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: During a November 19-20 visit to Bishkek, Central Asia Officer Director Pamela Spratlen met with political party leaders, the head of the Central Election Commission, civil society activists, and other leading analysts. Discussion centered on the December 16 parliamentary elections, the first in Kyrgyzstan to be conducted entirely by party list. Party leaders expressed deep concerns that administrative resources would be deployed to support the pro-presidential Ak Jol party, and that high thresholds could lead to undemocratic results. The head of the CEC defended the process, saying that the thresholds were designed to force of consolidation of political parties and prevent "regionalism." In each of her meetings, Spratlen stressed the importance of a free and fair election, in which the resulting parliament reflects the views of all the voters. Spratlen's meeting with Foreign Minister Karabayev is reported reftel. End Summary.

Technical Advisors: Problems with the Process

¶2. (C) The country directors for NDI, IRI, and IFES briefed visiting Central Asia Office Director Pamela Spratlen on their work with political parties, domestic election monitors, and the Central Election Commission (CEC) to prepare for the December 16 parliamentary elections. They noted that the shortened campaign period made these tasks more difficult. One representative pointed out that the CEC had failed to clarify some points of the new election code, and it had changed its interpretation of other provisions, leaving the political parties confused. If the CEC is uncertain about key provisions at this late date, what does that say about the process, one asked.

Ata Meken: An Unfair Fight

13. (C) Spratlen met November 19 with Omurbek Tekebayev, Kubatbek Baibolov, and Temir Sariyev, the leaders of Ata Meken, the largest opposition party contesting the elections. Tekebayev said that this election represented a moral choice, because Kyrgyzstan was on the edge between authoritarianism and democracy. Bakiyev, he said, lacked any regard for the rule of law and was seeking uncontrolled power. All three believed that in a fair fight Ata Meken would win a majority of seats, and, therefore, Bakiyev was using "all administrative resources" to support his Ak Jol party. Baibolov noted that with very small salaries, local officials and teachers (who make up the majority of the positions on precinct election commissions) were susceptible to administrative pressure. Tekebayev noted that the CEC's interpretation of the 0.5% regional threshold effectively created a very high barrier, and there was a substantial risk of a one-party parliament. Sariyev chided the international community for not taking a stronger stand against Bakiyev's abuses, including against the fraudulent constitutional referendum in October. To help prevent fraud, Sariyev asked for many more international observers. (Note: OSCE/ODIHR has requested 250 short-term observers for its election observation mission. End note.) Noting that Bakiyev controlled much of the mass media, Baibolov asked for more U.S. support for independent media, including increasing the broadcasting hours for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's Kyrgyz-language Radio Azattyk.

Ak Jol: We're the Disadvantaged Party

BISHKEK 00001425 002.2 OF 004

14. (C) Ak Jol party co-leader Elmira Ibraimova told Spratlen on November 19 that Ak Jol was the "most disadvantaged" party. Unlike the other parties with longer histories, Ak Jol was new and it was scrambling to get ready for the elections, Ibraimova claimed. Further, candidates from other parties were skirting the campaign rules by advertising their businesses or giving interviews, but the CEC had stopped Ak Jol from distributing its "purely informational" newspaper. (Note: This meeting took place prior to the start of the official campaign period on November 26. End Note.) She said that while Ak Jol was a pro-presidential party, it was not using administrative resources. Asked by the Ambassador about the status of her position as the director of the World Bank-funded ARIS rural development program during the campaign, Ibraimova said she had an agreement with the World Bank not to use the extensive ARIS structure for party purposes.

SDPK: Caught between Government and Opposition

15. (C) Edil Baisalov, Executive Secretary of the Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan (SDPK), told Spratlen November 20 that his party was in a difficult position standing between government and opposition. Some people supported the party because it was close to power with party leader Almaz Atambayev serving as prime minister, while some of the party rank and file were upset with Atambayev's support for Bakiyev. As long as Atambayev was prime minister, the party was limited in what it could say, including criticizing the high thresholds for entering parliament. (Note: Bakiyev dismissed Atambayev on November 28. End Note.) Baisalov said that Atambayev did not have real power as prime minister, but he thought that history would judge that Atambayev did the right thing in becoming prime minister in April, because doing so had prevented bloodshed.

16. (C) In the coming election, Baisalov said, the SDPK wanted to present itself as the "reasonable alternative," and he

thought the party could get 15 seats in parliament, though this would be difficult given the regional thresholds and administrative pressure. Right now, he said, the administration was acting as if it could get away with anything, and there was a great deal of pressure on local officials. He hoped that the administration would allow the opposition to get seats in the parliament.

Communists: What Can We Do?

¶17. (C) Head of the Party of Communists of Kyrgyzstan, Iskhak Masaliyev, told Spratlen November 20 that he had suggested a regional threshold for election to parliament, and it would have been a good idea if based on the population in each region. He claimed that the White House had deliberately mis-written the provision so that the 0.5% regional threshold would be calculated based on the national list of voters (creating a disproportional impact in the different oblasts).

But now that the law was adopted, he said, it was too late to change the rule. He said that Bakiyev was trying to create a single-party parliament, following the example of Kazakhstan.

Kulov: Bakiyev Seeking Monopoly of Power

¶18. (C) Former Prime Minister and Ar Namys party leader Felix Kulov warned of Bakiyev's unchallenged authority. He predicted fraudulent activity, particularly in the south, during the elections, and he feared that Bakiyev would hold a monopoly on all government authority if the pro-government parties gain control of parliament. Kulov did not think that

BISHKEK 00001425 003.2 OF 004

fraudulent elections would provoke much reaction. He said that he would not dispute the results, and he thought that the weak economy would keep the population from protesting the election results. However, Kulov claimed that following the elections, there would be a 30% hike in gasoline prices, and that this shock could spark civil unrest.

CEC: Thresholds Will Strengthen Parties

¶19. (C) CEC Chair Klara Kabilova defended the CEC's interpretation of the 0.5% threshold, saying that it reflected the views of the president and the administration. She said that Kyrgyzstan had too many political parties, and the thresholds would force parties to "merge and grow," improving the quality of the candidates. Spratlen pointed out that the likely result of such thresholds was a parliament with only one or two parties, and she stressed the importance for all voters to be represented in the parliament.

¶10. (C) Asked about the credibility of the process given reports of widespread fraud during the October constitutional referendum, Kabilova claimed that the CEC had received no complaints about the referendum and said this election would be conducted according to the code. Kabilova acknowledged that some local election officials (incorrectly) perceived pressure on them, but this was a problem of "inherited mentality." She said she planned to travel to all of the regions to meet with local administrative officials to tell them there should be no pressure put on local election commissions. Kabilova said that after a month and a half on the job, she had come to view the international community as a "partner," and she greatly appreciated the technical support from organizations such as IFES.

Econ Analysts: Administrative Resources for Ak Jol

¶11. (C) The local World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) representatives, as well as two Kyrgyz business sector

executives, highlighted for Spratlen over a dinner conversation the business support and governmental "administrative resources" being employed to support the pro-Bakiyev Ak Jol party. The two Kyrgyz drew parallels between recent political developments and former President Askar Akayev's attempts to create a "pocket parliament." The World Bank's Roger Robinson separately engaged Spratlen and the Ambassador in a heated discussion about concerns that Ak Jol party leader Elmira Ibraimova was using her position as the head of a World Bank-funded rural development project to benefit her party.

¶12. (C) Robinson also outlined his efforts to secure a judicial system "diagnostic" to complement planned Millennium Challenge Corporation activities. The IMF's James McHugh noted that IMF-funded training of judges would begin in January. Among other highlights -- a third version of the long-debated tax code should be presented to the new parliament by March 2008, and the government is focusing on monopolistic conditions in wheat distribution rather than mooted price controls at the retail level to combat wheat and bread price inflation.

Comment

¶13. (C) Most interlocutors were concerned that the use of administrative resources during the campaign and fraudulent manipulation of the vote could keep the new parliament from being representative. All of the parties were concerned about the barrier created by the CEC's interpretation of the

BISHKEK 00001425 004.2 OF 004

0.5% regional threshold, requiring parties to get approximately 13,500 votes in each of the seven oblasts, in Bishkek, and in Osh city. Such a threshold makes it likely that no more than one or two parties will get into parliament. In each of her meetings, Spratlen stressed the importance of a credible process, and the risk to Kyrgyzstan if the resulting parliament does not reflect the views of all the voters.

¶14. (U) Central Asia Office Director Spratlen has cleared this cable.
LITZENBERGER